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CANADIAN PRIORITIES FOR THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

Franklyn Griffiths

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125 promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2
Telephone/Téléphone : 613 944 8278 Fax/Télécopieur : 613 944 0687
www.cfp-pec.gc.ca

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George Ignatieff Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies

University College, University of Toronto

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Action is urgently required to ensure that the Arctic Council gets off to the best start possible during the remainder of the period to fall 1998, when Canada hands over the chair of the Council to another state, possibly to the United States. Measures should also be taken now to impart greater strength to the Council and to Canadian participation in it over the long haul.

The Arctic Council was established in September 1996 without an agreed agenda, corresponding working groups, or terms of reference and rules of procedure. It had to be done that way, owing principally to the restrictive attitude of the United States to multilateral Arctic cooperation, or not be established at all. As of March 1997, terms of reference will not be set until the senior Arctic officials' meeting in September 1997, if then. As to an agenda and working groups, they are nowhere in sight. Indeed, it appears to be U.S. policy, set by lower-echelon officials, that no substantive action be considered by the Council until the Ministerial meeting and rotation of the chair in 1998. To get the Council moving and to hand it over as a going concern that cannot readily be constricted no matter which state next has the advantages of the chair, Canada has no choice but to act at the political level again.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is to have bilaterals with his U.S. and Russian counterparts at the G-7 meeting in June, and with the Danish and Norwegian Foreign Ministers at the NATO summit in July. He is also in a position to meet with or write to the Finnish and Swedish Ministers, and to have discussions with the three permanent participants on the Council's work. Given his willingness to use these encounters to drive the Arctic Council forward into substantive activity, there is an opportunity to generate ministerial marching orders for the senior officials' meeting in September, instructing them to set up a series of Arctic Council working groups on priority themes which would also be open to discussion by permanent participants at the September gathering. If the Minister is to succeed in this, he will need to have in hand a strong set of proposals for priority action by the Arctic Council by the time of the G-7 meeting, if not earlier. In effect, we are talking about a circumpolar element in the preparations for Denver.

Recommendation 1: for the Circumpolar Ambassador and DFAIT to produce an Arctic Council Action Plan by the end of May 1997 for the use of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in upcoming bilaterals with his Arctic counterparts.

Recommendation 2: for the Action Plan to consist of scoping, knowledge-gathering, and priority-setting by Arctic Council working groups to be set up on some or all of the following themes, the results to be reviewed at the 1998 Ministerial meeting when the Council's sustainable development programme is formally to be launched.

Focus on the Children of the Arctic in Launching the Council's sustainable development programme. Sustainable development, the agreed priority concern of the Arctic Council in close conjunction with environmental protection, is sufficiently amorphous and contradictory to yield an unmanageable profusion of proposals for understanding and action. We badly need a way of getting to the heart of the problem that imparts clear meaning and symbolic appeal to the Council's work. Since sustainable development is widely understood to mean decision-making today that takes full account of its effects on future generations, the Arctic Council can do no better than to begin by focusing its sustainable development programme on the next generation, the children of the Arctic today.

Environment, resource use, health, education including distance education, culture, communications, employment, human rights, local self-government, community development -- everything we might wish to consider under the heading of sustainable development comes vividly into focus when we address the condition of the Arctic's children and the need to improve their well-being. The same applies to the communities in which they live and to all the things that eat out the heart of communities and the prospects of the child. The status and welfare of children is now an increasingly prominent global theme of Canadian foreign policy and a personal priority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As well, the Nordic countries are heavily committed in this area domestically.

Canada should move boldly to commit the Arctic Council to focus its sustainable development programme on the children of the Arctic. Senator Landon Pearson, the Minister's Advisor on Children's Rights, has been consulted and could be asked to assist in the elaboration of a proposal. If the proposal is accepted by the Minister, Canada should key the forthcoming Whitehorse conference to sustainable development as it relates to the children of the region.

Role of the Arctic in global climate change. Madeleine Albright will seek advice from Tim Wirth. If we are to have more than a momentary respite from the lower-level bureaucratic naysaying and reluctance of the United States, the Arctic Council must be made of continuing relevance to Wirth. But Wirth is reported to have little interest in the Arctic as such. His primary concern is with global environmental issues, particularly climate change, biodiversity, and also sustainable development. To interest Wirth more actively in Arctic affairs and the work of the Council, we must make clear to him the Council's potential to assist in the understanding and where possible the mitigation of global environmental threats. The suggestion here is for the Arctic Council to address the role of the region in climate change (methane release from permafrost, effects of ozone depletion on Arctic ocean-atmosphere dynamics, the Odden effect, and so on). It could also be particularly valuable for the Council to sponsor an investigation of possible interconnections between climate change and the role of the Arctic as a sink for pollutants: findings here could readily be used to bolster the case for global action to abate the long-range transport of pollutants into the region.

On its own merits, therefore, and in order to sustain U.S. interest in the Arctic Council at the political level, Canada needs to make the case for a climate change priority in the Council's

work. Equally important, when the case is ready, not only should the Minister invite the U.S. to lead a working group, but the argument should be brought to Wirth's personal attention through the use of intermediaries such as Maurice Strong. E.F. Roots, Science Advisor Emeritus for Environment Canada, could provide invaluable assistance to those in DFAIT charged with putting the case together.

Arctic marine transportation. This is an up and coming issue as the Russian Federation moves to exploit its Arctic offshore oil and natural gas reserves and is faced with continued deterioration of its pipeline system. Norway, Russia, and also Japan have financed a multi-million dollar programme of research into the intensified use of the Northern Sea Route for bulk transportation between Europe and Asia, and from the Russian Arctic to western markets. Chernomyrdin has expressed interest in the Arctic Council as a forum for international cooperation and support of new ventures in this area. For its part, the Greenland HRG has granted offshore oil exploration permits in concessions west of Nuuk and in Jamison Land and adjacent waters, all with an eye to eventual transportation by marine mode. Economics and politics may also conspire one day to open the way for U.S. offshore oil shipments westwards from the Beaufort Sea. Meanwhile, PAME is actively concerned with Arctic shipping developments, and Transport Canada has been leading IMO-sponsored talks on the harmonization of Arctic ship rules with a special regard for environmental protection.

The Arctic Council clearly has a pro-active role to play here. The role is both to ensure that precedents set in the evolution of marine transportation in one or more subregions of the circumpolar North are consistent with the wider requirements of sustainable development at the regional level, and to facilitate the coordination of national assets to assist the Russian Federation in particular as it puts together the necessary infrastructure, environmental and social impact assessment included, for safe bulk transport by marine mode. Norway and Russia could therefore be approached to co-chair an Arctic Council working group on marine transportation. John Karau, who is with Environment Canada and heads the PAME effort, could be of particular assistance as DFAIT starts to flesh out a proposal in this area.

Abatement of Arctic food contamination. The Canadian Polar Commission has recently identified human health threats resulting from long-range transport of pollutants as the prime issue in Canada's North. AMAP has progressed to the point where a region-wide assessment of food contamination is within reach. The time is ripe for the Arctic states and permanent participants in the Council to start building a two-pronged long-term abatement strategy. On the one hand, there is the need for coordinated health risk assessment and mitigation on a region-wide basis. Health risks to children in particular could well provide an initial point of departure as for example in regard to genetic damage, birth defects, and behavioural disorders. Secondly, a long-term science and communications strategy will have to be devised to address the problem at source by tracing pollutant origins and raising global awareness of the special vulnerability of the Arctic as a geophysical repository for pollution generated by world-wide practices of unsustainable development.

But before the first step is taken, we need to remind ourselves of the need to consult and to hold forth the prospect of consultation with northern inhabitants even in the initial formulation of a proposal here and in regard to other initiatives being discussed in this report. After all, an abatement strategy for food contamination will require the collection and study of human blood and tissue samples. These are likely to be given freely, but certainly not if the initiative were somehow handed down as a priority from on high by the Eight or, in Canada, by well-intended Ministers.

Denmark/Greenland could be invited to lead an Arctic Council working group on the theme of food contamination. David Stone of DIAND, who is AMAP chair and who has been spoken with very briefly, would be the first person to contact for guidance in the coordination of a Canadian proposal.

Basic principles of sustainable development in the Arctic. The Arctic Council is in need of a bridging procedure to help manage the transition from environmental protection to sustainable development as the overall framework for its activity. As matters stand, there is an inclination among attentive NGOs to regard the transition in terms of a move from environmental protection to a priority for development. Further growth of this attitude will not serve the Council well, particularly among opinion-makers in Washington. In addition, among officials around the region sustainable development has been regarded as something of a non-starter in that it connotes considerably more ambitious, expensive, and possibly unworkable commitments than are suggested by environmental protection. In effect, there is a problem not merely of coherence but of faith in the Council's transition to a sustainable development programme. The solution to the problem is not merely to give due regard to environmental protection, but to develop confidence-building principles for collective action in the use of Arctic resources.

Basic principles of sustainable development will have to be tailored to the particular ecological and also the cultural and socio-economic conditions of the circumpolar North. They should be keyed substantively to an ecosystems approach, and procedurally to an understanding that ecosystems are more likely to be respected when resource users closest to the effects of collective action are directly associated with the decisions that give rise to it. Specifically, there is need for an Arctic Council working group to codify and help standardize national experience on the use of (a) renewable and (b) non-renewable resources throughout the region. Basic principles for the regulation of activity in these two fields should contribute greatly to the practice of sustainable development in the Arctic, while also lending strength to collective action within the Arctic Council itself.

Sweden could be invited to lead a working group on basic principles of sustainable development if indeed groups were to be apportioned to all members of the Arctic Council.

An Arctic communications strategy. The proposal here is for member states to deploy their existing cultural, scientific, education, and telecommunications assets in order to sustain

their Arctic communities, to affirm their common identity as northern countries, and to project a world-wide image of the Arctic as a unique region and global showcase of sustainable development. At the community level, the strategy would aim to develop region-wide interactive networks on matters such as the status of the child, distance education, telemedicine, consolidation and use of traditional ecological knowledge, food contamination, on-site observation and discussion of climate change, special health and social concerns of non-aboriginal northerners, artwork and the dissemination of artistic creations to southern markets, tourism, democratization and local self-government as they applied in the Russian Federation in particular, and so on. Regionally, a communications strategy would seek to enhance shared understandings of the circumpolar North and of sustainable development there among influentials and others in southern centres of decision in the Arctic countries. Opportunities would be exploited for industrial participation in telecommunications alliances. Indeed, the potential to create an Arctic equivalent of TV-5 could be explored and associated with the Canadian International Information Strategy (CIIS), either as an add-on or as a free-standing circumpolar venture. Globally, a coordinated communications effort would see the Eight project to worldwide audiences an understanding of the Arctic as a singular and creative but vulnerable region with much to offer in the evolution of a world practice of sustainable development.

Where Canada in particular is concerned, collaboration in the Arctic Council on the culture and communication of sustainable development would serve to enrich and enlarge the third pillar of our foreign policy. It would do so by multilateralizing Canadian activity in the field of international cultural, scientific, and educational activity, and by extending third-pillar operations into the realm of sustainable development at the regional and community levels. We would be in a position not only to present Canadian values and Canada's northern identity to others, but over the long haul to assimilate the northern identities of other Arctic countries, Russia foremost, to some of the Canadian way of seeing and doing things.

The Arctic Council is ready-made for multilateral third-pillar interaction among the countries of the region. It should be used for this purpose. Although Canada is especially well endowed to lead in this area, responsibility for a working group on communications could well go to Finland which is now the most wireless country in the world. Robin Higham of DFAIT's International Cultural Relations Bureau, who has been consulted, could assist in the development of a proposal for the Minister in this area. The CIIS project could also be asked to report promptly on the Arctic communications potential of the CIIS strategy.

Whether or not each of the foregoing proposals for substantive activity by the Arctic Council is moved forward by the Minister -- we should take care not to overload the Council with working groups when it will also have to determine the outlines of a sustainable development programme for adoption in the fall of 1998-- there is no shortage of project themes to develop for the Minister's consideration and for discussion with his circumpolar counterparts.

A set of detailed proposals should now be worked out by the Circumpolar Ambassador and the Department in consultation with other federal agencies and, to the extent possible

between now and the Denver G-7 meeting, with other interested parties and sources of expertise. Taken together, working group themes such as those recommended here should readily be presented by the Minister as a means of advancing the sustainable development agenda of the Arctic Council. If asked to state which are the most promising and pressing, in my opinion it would be (a) *climate change* so as to address the particular preferences of the United States, (b) *children of the Arctic* to launch a regional programme of sustainable development, and (c) *communications strategy* to help knit it all together and project the Arctic interest outwards.

To turn now to a longer-term perspective, the Standing Committee's draft report on Canada and the circumpolar world is replete with recommendations that bear on the Arctic Council and Canada's performance within it. The report should give a strong uplift to the Canadian effort to make the most of the Council. Two matters of particular importance have not however been addressed by the Standing Committee. The first concerns the resources required to make a success of the Arctic Council in the long haul.

The AEPS has been based on the coordination and redeployment of existing national assets. With very few exceptions, it has not seen the injection of new money. The March 1997 meeting of senior Arctic officials has confirmed what most expected for the Arctic Council: that there will be no new money for it either, notwithstanding the commitment of the Eight to broach the more challenging and potentially costly agenda of sustainable development. The projects proposed here for Arctic Council working groups should not entail any early requirement for significant new resources. Piggy-backing and recombination of available assets should do the job. But new resources including new money will have to be found if the Council is to move beyond study and standardization to action and especially pro-action on sustainable development. Now is the time to start strengthening the Arctic Council's capacity for action.

Even if the Eight were to become more liberal in the provision of resources as the affairs of the Council acquired greater standing at the political level in some or all of the circumpolar countries, there is sure to be a continuing gap between the ends and the means of sustainable development in the Arctic. To help narrow the gap over time, the EU and non-Arctic states such as China, Germany, and Japan could now start to be drawn into the work of the Council. Already the EU and within it Germany has a growing presence in the network of regional institutions, most notably in the Barents Euro-Arctic Regional Council. Japan has interests in Arctic marine transportation, and could well be associated with the work of the Arctic Council in this and other areas. China, which has extensive permafrost in its northern regions, is already a participant in the International Arctic Science Committee. It is also looking ahead to superpower status in the coming century.

In each of these instances there is an opportunity for Canada not merely to build a circumpolar dimension into its bilateral relations, but to help bring new resources to the Council in due course by starting now to encourage significant extra-regional actors to join in the work of sustainable development in the Arctic. There are difficulties here that extend well beyond a reluctance within the Eight to admit others into the affairs of what some still regard as a private

preserve. Above all, there is the potential for non-Arctic actors with highly focused objectives not only to skew the priorities of circumpolar institutions, but to accentuate the development side of the sustainable development equation. Nevertheless, the Arctic is not and cannot be regarded as a region apart. On the contrary, it is linked in countless ways with its extra-regional and global surround. And its problems will not properly be addressed without reference to the surrounding environment.

The privileged status of the Arctic states and permanent participants in the Council's structure, combined with an informal and possibly an explicit understanding of basic principles of sustainable development in the region, will serve to ensure the prevalence of a circumpolar perspective that is attuned to the particular ecological, cultural, and socio-economic conditions of the Arctic. Accordingly, for Canada to offer leadership to the Arctic Council in associating non-Arctic actors with the institution would be not only to generate downstream resources for collective action on sustainable development, but to integrate the handling of Arctic issues into the wider world which so heavily affects the physical and human processes of the region..

Recommendation 3: for Canada to provide leadership in associating interested and capable non-Arctic states and the European Union with the sustainable development programme of the Arctic Council.

Just as the Minister finds it necessary to act on the political level to advance the Arctic Council's agenda, within Canada there is also a need for more active political involvement in circumpolar affairs if Canada's participation in the Arctic Council is to match its potential to make a contribution. As matters stand, the office of the Circumpolar Ambassador and the Interdepartmental Committee on Circumpolar Affairs are Canada's prime means for priority-setting on Arctic international matters. Both are in need of support, particularly but by no means solely from DFAIT where, as is the case with the U.S. State Department, the Arctic is generally viewed as "remote for many" (Russell 1996: 8). The Standing Committee's report comes as a breath of fresh air in its offering of many new and useful recommendations for increased participation and activation in Canadian policy-making for Arctic international relations. Granted the resources required to act on the Standing Committee's suggestions, it could nevertheless take considerable time to put them into effect. All the while, we may expect a continued deficit of substance and backing in Canada's participation in the Arctic Council. After all, the Minister can provide political energy and a sense of direction only so many times. A greater measure of boost and substance can however be had fairly simply and inexpensively by practising in the Interdepartmental Committee on Circumpolar Affairs what we preach for the Arctic Council.

Canada's vision for the Arctic Council has been utterly consistent in its commitment to the empowerment of northern residents, first and foremost the aboriginal peoples of the region. Stirred by the belief that collective action in an Arctic setting may be made more sustainable if those closest to and most knowledgeable of the scene are enabled to take part in the framing and resolution of Arctic issues, Canada has persisted in championing the role of permanent

participants in the Council's work. Indeed, it is difficult to image a worthwhile Arctic Council without international aboriginal participation. We would be left with yet another forum for inter-governmental cooperation, but this time for cooperation among southern-based governments for whom the Arctic broadly remains a remote concern and whose activities there are all too likely to be ill-adapted in the absence of strong northern input.

If this is what we hold to be true for international policy-making on Arctic issues, it is also true for equivalent Arctic-related activity within Canada. The implications are obvious for the Interdepartmental Committee on Circumpolar Affairs, Canada's interagency mechanism for regional policy-making which is only now beginning to move beyond departmental show and tell among less than senior officials.

A political commitment should be made to widen the basis of stakeholder participation in the Interdepartmental Committee's work, renaming the committee in the process. Mirroring Canada's conception of engagement in the Arctic Council, the new institution should become a forum for direct representation of northern and other relevant Canadian stakeholders in a transparent policy-making process keyed to sustainable development and possibly also to human security. As with the Arctic Council, the new forum would function by means of a consensual process of decision in which federal government agencies alone would state a consensus that had nevertheless been actively informed by the views of those most directly affected. Certain stakeholders would be accorded permanent participant standing in the forum -- the two territorial governments, interested provinces, the Nunavut Implementation Commission, national aboriginal associations such as the ITC, the Assembly of First Nations, the Metis Council, and the Arctic Parliamentarians Committee. Others, including interested environmental NGOs and industrial associations, would take part as observers with rights of intervention. The effect within Canada would be to create a new and potent instrument for sustainable development and human security in the circumpolar Arctic, the Canadian Arctic very much included. Somnolent interdepartmental coordination and active outreach by the Circumpolar Ambassador would be superseded by a live policy process that should energize Canadian participation in circumpolar affairs including those handled by the Arctic Council.

Internationally, the effect of Canadian innovation in Arctic policy-making would be to improve the outlook for sustainable development, and for the Arctic Council itself, by setting a precedent for the adaptation of national conduct to the particular conditions of the circumpolar North. As of now, U.S. officials are using the process of drafting rules of procedure for the Arctic Council to diminish the participation of international aboriginal associations. While there is little that Canada can do about this in a consensual negotiation, it is within our power to counter the effect of U.S. actions now and over the long haul by creating and advertising a circumpolar policy process within Canada that more than substantiates everything we have been urging on the other Arctic states.

Recommendation 4: for the Minister of Foreign Affairs to apply the Arctic Council formula for northern and interested non-northern representation in a new Canadian procedure for the making of policy on circumpolar affairs.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Canada needs urgently to strengthen the Arctic Council as an institution. To this end, the following is recommended:

Recommendation 1: for the Circumpolar Ambassador and DFAIT to produce an Arctic Council Action Plan by the end of May 1997 for the use of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in upcoming bilaterals with his Arctic counterparts.

Recommendation 2: for the Action Plan to consist of scoping, knowledge-gathering, and priority-setting by Arctic Council working groups to be set up on some or all of the following themes, the results to be reviewed at the fall 1998 Ministerial meeting when the Council's sustainable development programme is formally to be launched:

(a) focus on the children of the Arctic in launching the Council's sustainable development programme (Canada to take the lead);

(b) the role of the Arctic in global climate change (United States to be invited to lead);

(c) international cooperation to ensure that Arctic marine transportation of oil and natural gas is environmentally and socially sustainable (Norway and the Russian Federation to be invited to lead jointly);

(d) abatement of Arctic food contamination from long-range transport of pollutants;

(e) codification of basic principles for the sustainable use of renewable and non-renewable resources in the Arctic; and

(f) an Arctic communications strategy to meet the information and cultural needs of northern communities, and to enhance global awareness of the region.

Recommendation 3: for Canada to offer leadership in associating interested and capable non-Arctic states and the European Union with the sustainable development programme of the Arctic Council; and

Recommendation 4 : for the Minister of Foreign Affairs to apply the Arctic Council formula for northern and interested non-northern representation in a new Canadian procedure for the making of policy on circumpolar affairs.